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RR RUEHPA
DE RUEHUJA #2119/01 3012011
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4284
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 0172
RUEHSB/AMEMBASSY HARARE 0078
RUEHNK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 0038
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 1451
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 0443
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS 0144
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 002119

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W, INF/AA

E.O. 12958: DECL 10/27/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES WITH FONMIN CURRENT PRECARIOUS
POLITICAL CLIMATE, GON LEADERSHIP ISSUES AND PENDING SUPREME COURT
CASE

Classified By: Ambassador Robin R. Sanders for reasons 1.4 (b & d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Ambassador had a two hour one-on-one meeting with Nigerian Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe at his home evening October 26 following his arrival from the Cotonou October 24-25 NEDPAD peer review meeting on Uganda and Nigeria. The main points the Ambassador raised during the meeting were: uncertain state of Nigeria's political climate; President Yar'Adua precarious health and its attendant impact on leadership; the lack of movement on the much-talked about Cabinet reshuffle; the pending Supreme Court(SC) decision, the must-have EFCC deliverable on ex-Delta State Governor Ibori, and the problems in the fractious ruling PDP party, which just ended its October 23-24 stakeholders' meeting in Akom Ibom. Ambassador also commended the FonMin on the GON's strong stance on Mauritania, particularly his refusing to see the latter's foreign minister at the recent UNGA session or receiving a delegation here in Nigeria. She also took note of the FonMin's response to her query on the GON's efforts on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) seat where he said that Nigeria would be working "diplomatically to convince" Togo and Sierra Leone to step aside on this issue. He also informed the Ambassador that the USG would be pleased that the GON pushed back on China's request to deny a Nigerian visa to the Dali Lama who will be arriving in Lagos for a November civil society event. On the SC, stressing that this was his personal view as a lawyer, Maduekwe stated that he did not anticipate the Supreme Court would overturn the Appeal Court's position, noting that he expected a decision in late November or early December 2008. He also thought this would be about the same time there would be a final announcement on the GON cabinet reshuffle. On Zimbabwe the FonMin said he told the new South African President while he was in Cotonou that if a power-sharing agreement could not be reached, then there should be a call for new elections. End Summary.

President Yar'Adua's Health and the Political Climate:

¶2. (C) Ambassador had requested to see Nigerian Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe to cover a range of issues prior to his departure for India October 28, 2008, where he was going to seek to stop the pending execution of a dozen Nigerians on death row for drug smuggling. On the evening of October 26, the Ambassador was able to have a two hour chat with the FonMin at his home upon his arrival from the Cotonou NEPAD peer review meeting on Nigeria, and prior to his departure for India. Ambassador began the informal session by frankly raising a

number of issues with Maduekwe, most notably the sense that Nigeria was adrift in direction and leadership and that everyone was a bit worried about where the country was headed. In addition, she noted that there was a sense that all of this was connected to President Yar'Adua's precarious health issues. We, like many in the international community, the Ambassador said, had heard that the President has "new serious medical issues" that have recently come to the fore in addition to his history of kidney disease. This had the U.S. and others very concerned about the country's leadership and the required "energy level and focus" Yar'Adua needed to head such a large and complex country like Nigeria.

13. (C) Maduekwe listened carefully and said that he really did not have any details on the President's health or any possible "new issues" that had arisen in this regard. He frankly stated he was not privy to those kinds of details, but could only speak about his contact with Yar'Adua, which he added was almost daily. The FonMin said, as regards to the issues for his Ministry and during his meetings with President Yar'Adua, that he always seemed focused, knew the details of the brief, and was very analytical about the issues he wanted to cover. The FonMin added that he has not personally seen any specific changes in the President's behavior. "That being said," Maduekwe continued, "Yar'Adua is not Obasanjo who seemed to have boundless energy, was up until 2- a.m. everyday, and would hold meetings at all hours of the night. Yar'Adua is not like this and never will be; this is not his style as he is soft spoken and an introvert, but this is not to be mistaken for someone who is not focused," he concluded.

14. (C) Ambassador restated that she was sharing with the FonMin the

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USG sense, as well as from others in the international community, that the President is seriously ill and that this is in part a reason for the concern that things maybe off track and not moving forward in Nigeria. She added that there was such optimism for Yar'Adua in December 2007 that he would move Nigeria forward on rule of law, governance, and other key issues. However, since that time the optimism has faded and the prevailing view now is concern about where Nigeria is headed. The FonMin then shared some of the comments made at the recent Cotonou NEPAD meeting on Nigeria over the weekend by Ethiopia's Meles and Kenya's leading statesman Kipilagat. He noted that Meles said that there was concern that Nigeria was not living up to "its development potential, not taking advantage of its vast human resources, and not using its intellectual capital well." For his part, according to Maduekwe, Kipilagat told the Nigerian FonMin that "if Nigeria does not do well, then no country in Africa can do well and really move forward on development." The Foreign Minister admitted that there was some truth to these comments, and it will take time for all of these issues to be worked out given Nigeria's complexities.

Timing Issues - Cabinet Reshuffle and Supreme Court

15. (C) Adding to the current subject of drifting leadership, the Ambassador asked if the Foreign Minister had any idea when the GON cabinet reshuffle would happen or when the Supreme Court (SC) would make a decision. On the former, Maduekwe said he thought that the entire discussion on the GON cabinet reshuffle had been very badly handled from a public relations point of view. He said if the Villa was not ready, the spokesperson should not have raised the specter of an announcement so soon. He restated his earlier point that President Yar'Adua "takes his time and is slow," and that he would not make any announcement on cabinet changes until he was ready and comfortable in doing so and believed he had the right people in place. However, the FonMin added, that things had progressed in such a manner on the political side that he could not foresee any cabinet announcement soon because of the current impasse on the 2008 budget amendment, and the upcoming 2009 budget which is scheduled to be sent to the National Assembly (NA) on October 27 (some press reports note that the NA received the 2009 budget on October 27). Maduekwe explained that it would be difficult to change ministers such as finance and others and expect them to sign off on a budget approved by a previous minister without wanting to review it and concur. Emphasizing again that all this was his personal opinion, the Foreign Minister also

commented that he thought that the pending Supreme Court (SC) decision -- which he believed would be announced in late November or early December 2008 -- was also now a factor that would further delay the timing of a cabinet reshuffle. He also opined that, as a lawyer, he did not see how the SC could overturn the Appeal Court decision, and he did not expect an annulment of the 2007 election. Maduekwe added that the SC might call for reelections in a few states with gross irregularities, but he would find it hard to believe that they would overturn the entire election.

Ruling PDP internal Politics

¶6. (C) Changing the subject to the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), the Ambassador then asked the Foreign Minister (who served as PDP Secretary prior to his Ministerial appointment) about the PDP stakeholder's meeting Oct 23-24 in Akom Ibom and the lingering reports that the party is increasingly becoming more fractious. Maduekwe noted that given his heavy travel schedule as FonMin, he has had to miss many PDP party meetings, including the stakeholder session last weekend. However, the Foreign Minister commented that although there are groups within the PDP, such as those led by former presidents Obasanjo and Babingida, and the cadre of Northern governors, he thought overall the party was still strong and had the most political support throughout the country. Ambassador remarked that she had heard that former vice-president Atiku was being wooed back into the PDP. Maduekwe said that there were certainly a lot of back and forth on this issue, including Atiku's own desire to return to the party. In addition, the FonMin highlighted that Atiku still wants to be President of Nigeria and will find a way to use the

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support he still enjoys within the PDP to do so. He did not think, however, that Atiku would make any move on this issue until after the Supreme Court decision.

Nigeria: the UNSC seat and Mauritania

¶7. (C) In wrapping up, the Ambassador asked Maduekwe about Nigeria's interest in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) seat and whether the GON was robustly pursuing it despite Togo and Sierra Leone being respectively next in line. The Foreign Minister said that Nigeria certainly wanted the seat, and will begin the process of "diplomatically convincing" both Togo and Sierra Leone that they should quietly step aside and let this happen. He summed up by saying that Nigeria would not bully either nation into doing so given their friendly relationships and the role that Nigerian soldiers, in particular, played in helping to resolve the conflict in Sierra Leone, but Nigeria definitely wanted the UNSC seat. On Mauritania, the Ambassador thanked the GON for its strong position against the coup in Mauritania. Maduekwe said that this was appreciated, and that he also refused to see the Mauritanian Foreign Minister at UNGA and receive a delegation here in Nigeria. He noted that at the next African Union Peace and Security Commission he is considering raising the idea of sanctions.

¶8. (C) Comment: Foreign Minister Maduekwe continues to say and do many of the right things in line with USG objectives, particularly on Zimbabwe and Mauritania. It is credible that he is out of the loop on the details of the President's current medical status as we know that Yar'Adua's northern Katsina inner circle (meaning his wife, Economic Advisor Yakubu, Katsina Governor Shema, and Agricultural Minister Ruma) keep a tight reign on this issue. He did not seem surprised by the USG concerns about Nigeria's internal leadership issues, or questions the President's health. But, he wanted to underscore that Yar'Adua behaved similarly as Katsina Governor -- starting out very slow. We, on the other hand, believe that there is a lot more to the President's health issue than what is being officially said. Thus, we should remain prepared for any possible scenario in the medium term that might render Yar'Adua unable to complete his term in office. It does seem that Yar'Adua's supporters are counting on the Supreme Court to uphold the election, which would help his administration and those around him stay in power a bit longer. The question remains that if the SC does uphold the 2007 election and Yar'Adua's administration does stay in power, will it be any more effective than

it has been for the last 18 months. Former Vice President Atiku is clearly positioning himself to end up either as a PDP or Action Congress member as a power broker in Nigerian politics over the next two years. We are betting that he will return to the PDP not too long after the Supreme Court decision.

Sanders